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INTO SOME PASSAGES IN

Dr. *Johnson's* Lives of the Poets:

PARTICULARLY.

HIS OBSERVATIONS ON

LYRIC POETRY,

AND

THE ODES OF GRAY.

BY R. POTTER.

LONDON:

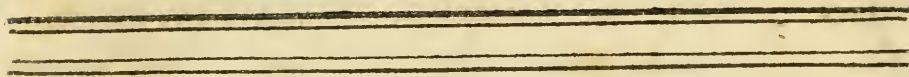
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A N
I N Q U I R Y, &c.

JUST Criticism, directed by superior learning and judgement, and tempered with candor, must at all times have an happy influence on the public taste, and of course be favourable to the interests and credit of literature. It is well known how much the age, in which he lived, was enlightened and refined by Mr. Addison; his judgement was just, his manner simple and elegant, and from his taste there is no appeal; his page was, like the vernal sun, bright and gentle; it gradually and imperceptibly dispelled the mists of barbarism which hung over learning, and spread an intellectual light, the influence of which was universal and permanent. Every age is not so happy as to produce an Addison; yet the present age owes much to the vigorous and manly understanding of Dr. Johnson: this truly respectable writer was early and deservedly distinguished by his great abilities, and the public

has so long been habituated to receive and submit to his decisions, that they are now by many considered as infallible. Some years ago he wrote the life of Savage, a man neither amiable nor virtuous, but of a singular character formed from singular circumstances of distress, which never happened before, probably will never happen again in the life of any other man : undeserved distress has a claim to pity ; and pity has always in it some mixture of love, which wishes to palliate the failings of the unfortunate sufferer ; Dr. Johnson has the feelings of humanity warm at his honest heart ; he has therefore with a free and spirited indignation stigmatized the unnatural mother, and to her unrelenting cruelty ultimately refers the faults of the unhappy son, faults which truth would not allow him to suppress, nor his virtue incline him to defend. In his account of Savage as a Poet, he places his genius in the fairest light, and makes just apologies for his inaccuracies. This little tract was written with an animated glow of sentiment, a vigorous and clear expression, and a pleasing candor sometimes perhaps stretched a little beyond the line of judgement : it pleased ; it must always please : no wonder then that the public expressed no small degree of satisfaction, when it was known that this celebrated author was engaged in writing the Lives of the most eminent English Poets, with critical observations on their works ; much was expected from his knowledge and judgement ; but high raised expectations are frequently disappointed : in these volumes, amidst the many just observations, the solid sense, and deep penetration which even his enemies must admire, his warmest friends find some passages which they must wish unwritten or obliterated.

It is not my intention to follow the Biographer through all the lives he has written; but, after a few cursory remarks, these pages will be confined to his observations on Lyric Poetry, particularly on the Odes of Mr. Gray. As I shall have frequent occasions to dissent from the Critic's judgment, I shall give my reasons freely and firmly, but with great respect to his understanding and virtues.

“ With the political tenets of the writer, I have nothing to do; my business is with his criticism:” yet it were to be wished that the spirit of party had not been so warmly diffused through this work; it is often disagreeable, but in the *Life of Milton* it is disgusting: not that I am inclined to defend the religious or political principles of our great poet; I know too well the intolerant spirit of that liberty, which worked its odious purposes through injustice, oppression, and cruelty; but it is of little consequence to the present and future ages whether the author of *Paradise Lost* was Papist or Presbyterian, Royalist or Republican; it is the Poet that claims our attention: if however in the *life of Milton* it were necessary to take notice of the part he bore in those disastrous times, it might have been more eligible to have imitated the moderation of J. Philips, who, though he wrote more than seventy years nearer those times, when the facts were yet fresh on mens memories, checked his expression of the abhorrence of them, through respect to his master, with this beautiful apostrophe,

And had that other Bard,
Oh, had but he, that first ennobled song

With holy raptures, like his Abdiel been,
 'Mongst many faithless, strictly faithful found ;
 Unpity'd he should not have wail'd his orbs,
 That roll'd in vain to find the piercing ray,
 And found no dawn, by dim suffusion veil'd !
 But he——However, let the Muse abstain,
 Nor blast his fame, from whom she learn'd to sing
 In much inferior strains.——

We are also sorry to see the masculine spirit of Dr. Johnson descending to what he perhaps in another might call “anile garrulity.” In reading the life of any eminent person we wish to be informed of the qualities which gave him the superiority over other men : when we are poorly put off with paltry circumstances, which are common to him with common men, we receive neither instruction nor pleasure. We know that the greatest men are subject to the infirmities of human nature equally with the meanest ; why then are these infirmities recorded ? Can it be of any importance to us to be told how many pair of stockings the author of the *Essay on Man* wore ? Achilles and Therfites eat, and drank, and slept ; in these things the Hero was not distinguished from the Buffoon : are we made the wiser or the better by being informed that the Translator of Homer stewed his Lampreys in a silver saucepan ? Who does not blush when he finds recorded that idle story of a nameless critic, who said of the author of the *Fleece*, *He will be buried in woolen* ? Is this held up for wit ? Is it intended as a sarcasm on Dyer ? Is it not an insult to the understanding of the reader ? Let me stop a moment to speak
 of

of this writer. “Dyer is not a poet of bulk or dignity sufficient to require an elaborate criticism.” Does Dr. Johnson estimate poetical merit, as Rubens did feminine beauty, *by the stone*? Well then might he recommend Blackmore to us. If the Fleece be now universally neglected, let me join my testimony to that of Akinfide, that such neglect is a reproach to the reigning taste; the poem is truly classical: to say that “Dyer’s mind was not unpoetical,” is parsimonious praise; he had a benevolent heart, a vigorous imagination, and a chastised judgement; his style is compact and nervous; his numbers have harmony, spirit, and force,

On they move

Indissolubly firm; nor obvious hill,

Nor streit’ning vale, nor wood, nor stream divides

Their perfect ranks.——

The present passion for anecdotes may make these levities pardonable: but when the narrative goes further, and reflects upon the social and moral character of a worthy person, it must be taken up in an higher tone. We are carefully informed of the avidity of Addison, of the eagerness with which he laid hold on his proportion of the profits arising from the papers of the Spectator, of his unmerciful exaction of an hundred pounds lent by him to Steele. If this be true, it only shows that Addison had not “exalted his moral to divine:” but the intervention of more than sixty years has not yet obliterated the remembrance of his gentle manners and benevolent disposition: that Steele was not an economist is well known; but what authority Dr. Johnson has for saying that

Addison reclaimed his loan by an execution, we are not told : I am told by the best authority that it is an absolute falsehood. This vindication is due to the memory of a man, who was universally respected whilst he lived, and “ of whose virtue it is a sufficient testimony, that the resentment of party has transmitted no charge of any crime ;” “ who taught, with great justness of argument and dignity of language, the most important duties, and sublime truths ;” “ who employed wit on the side of virtue and religion, purified intellectual pleasure, separated mirth from indecency,” enlightened and refined the age in which he lived, “ and excited such an emulation of intellectual elegance, that, from his time to our own, life has been gradually exalted, and conversation purified and enlarged.”

This purity, this enlargement leads us to resent the cruel manner in which Dr. Johnson speaks of the Lady, who is the subject of Hammond's Elegies : an old Goth would not have been guilty of such an indelicacy : but whatever character her lover, or his Biographer, may have bequeathed her, those, who were so happy as to be acquainted with her, speak of her as a very excellent and amiable woman. This offence against truth and good manners is the more inexcusable, as Dr. Johnson had opportunities enough of informing himself of the Lady's real character. With regard to Hammond, whether Mr. Shiels was misled by false accounts I cannot determine ; but that this Poet was not the Son of Anthony Hammond, who was allied to Sir Robert Walpole by marrying his Sister, I can assure the public upon the authority of that respectable family. His Elegies certainly have faults, which the Critic

is eagle-eyed to discover ; but they have beauties, against which he shuts his eyes ; a younger man might perhaps say with Spenser,

Such one's ill judge of love, that cannot love,
Ne in their frozen hearts feel kindly flame.
For-thy they ought not thing unknown reprove,
Ne natural affection faultless blame.

“ Why Hammond, *or other writers*, have thought the quatrain of ten syllables elegiac, it is difficult to tell.” Perhaps the difficulty is not great ; the next sentence may serve to explain it ; “ the character of the Elegy is gentleness and tenuity ;” no other measure in the English language glides with such easy sweetness, and in such a gentle strain of melody. “ But this Stanza has been pronounced by Dryden, whose knowledge of English metre was not inconsiderable, to be the most magnificent of all the measures which our language affords.” The critic himself accounts for this opinion of Dryden, “ Davenant was perhaps *at this time* his favourite author, though Gondibert never appears to have been popular ; and from Davenant he learned to please his ear with the stanza of four lines alternately rhymed.” The elegant Aikins, in their dissertation on Gondibert, have adverted to its measure with propriety and fine taste. But it is not for nothing that this opinion of Dryden is held out to us : Mr. Gray's Elegy is written in this metre ; it had been too desperate to have hazarded an open attack on that poem ; the Critic therefore shelters himself behind the authority of Dryden, and seems to direct his censure against Hammond, whilst the shaft is aimed at Gray.

It is pleasant enough to find this writer, who has so long dictated to the public taste, and that in a pretty high tone, gravely doubting whether the art of Gardening, in the present enlarged acceptation of the word, demands any great powers of mind: the manner, in which he puts the question, plainly shows his own opinion; but whatever “ a fullen and furly speculator may think,” the true judge of beautiful nature will esteem it an elegant exertion of real genius. But the tasteless ridicule on Shenstone is only the introduction to a cruel and unjust reflection on Lord Lyttelton. “ For awhile the inhabitants of Hagley affected to tell their acquaintance of the little fellow that was trying to make himself admired; but when by degrees the Leasowes forced themselves into notice, they took care to defeat the curiosity which they could not suppress, by conducting their visitants perversely to inconvenient points of view, and introducing them at the wrong end of a walk to detect a deception; injuries of which Shenstone would heavily complain. Where there is emulation there will be vanity, and where there is vanity there will be folly.” I respect my reader, and my self, too much to treat this malignant aspersions with the asperity it deserves. If the eminent virtues, the liberal disposition, and benevolent heart of Lord Lyttelton could not secure his character from such a rude attack, who may hope to escape? But happily the story carries its own confutation in itself: “ the spacious and opulent empire” can have no emulation of “ the petty state, on which it looks with disdain.” Can the majestic Skiddow be a jealous rival of the little unanimated hills of Dovedale? A candid writer will not record every idle tale he hears, which reflects dishonour

dishonour on a great and good character ; but when he is assured that the tale is false, it becomes his duty, as an honest man, to retract it ; Dr. Johnson had this assurance from the most honourable authority, which he ought to have respected, and to have done justice to the worthy inhabitants of Hagley. Detraction is an unamiable quality ; “ a man, said an excellent person on this occasion, who could take a pleasure in defacing fine pictures, or mutilating exquisite statues, would be justly odious ; because he would deprive elegant spectators of the pleasure arising from beautiful objects, and artists of proper subjects of imitation ; but the man, who endeavours to deface and mutilate examples of virtue, is guilty of a much greater crime.”

It is not without some degree of honest indignation that a person of candor observes this spirit of detraction diffused so universally through these volumes : of more than fifty of our Poets, whose lives are here given, how few have passed free from very severe censures ? the writer may have “ been led to this beyond his intention ;” but could it be “ by the honest desire of giving useful pleasure ?” If the Man has the good fortune to escape, the Poet is almost sure to be condemned : the work puts one in mind of the wicker Colossus of the Druids, in whose chambers of tribulation an hecatomb of wretches was at once offered as victims to some grim idol supposed to be propitiated by such horrid sacrifices.

Many of these writers,

Like twinkling stars the miscellanies o'er,

were indeed but faint luminaries in the hemisphere of poetry ; yet each shone with his portion of light, however small ; and it was the Critic's province to discriminate their lustre, and to show how much, or how little, each contributed to the general brightness. To have considered how learning and taste were gradually improved by them, how our language was enriched, and the harmony of its numbers refined ; to have ascertained with some degree of precision the various powers, the peculiar vein, the naïveté of each poet, would have been a curious and an useful investigation : this is done with much learning, judgement, and accuracy in the Life of Cowley ; which gave the reader a reasonable expectation of continued entertainment and instruction ; but he was soon disappointed ; one indiscriminating censure hides the face of things, and we are left to wander undirected in this gloom,

Quale per incertam lunam sub luce malignâ
Est iter in sylvis, ubi cœlum condidit umbrâ
Jupiter, et rebus nox abstulit atra colorem.

As the Poems of Pomfret, Yalden, and Watts, and the Creation of Blackmore were inserted in this collection by the recommendation of the Biographer, we may from thence form some judgement of his taste. He, who does not dislike Pomfret, may approve Yalden ; he, who finds pleasure in Blackmore, may be enraptured with Watts. But this sagacious and penetrating Critic has the peculiar felicity of discovering that Blackmore “ finds the art of uniting ornament with strength, and ease with closeness. This, he tells us is a skill which Pope might

might have condescended to learn from him, when he needed it so much in his *Moral Essays* *". Of Blackmore's skill, "his ratiocination and description," these lines from the *Song of Mopas*, annexed to his *Life*, are an happy specimen ;

He spread the pure cerulean fields on high,
And arch'd the chambers of the vaulted sky,
Which he, to suit their glory with their height,
Adorn'd with globes, *which reel as drunk with light.*

Further instances of this Critic's want of taste I leave to the observation of others ; he may soon hear of them from a very ingenious and respectable writer, who wants not spirit or ability to do justice to the injured Poets : my business is to attend him into the regions of Lyric Poetry. His good sense led him to reprobate that lax and lawless versification, which, under the name of Pindaric Odes, had long been a disgrace to Poetry and Pindar ; but it is with some degree of astonishment that we find him so warm in his commendations of Dryden's Poem on the death of Mrs. Killigrew ; this, he says, "is undoubtedly the noblest Ode that our language ever produced. The first part flows with a torrent of enthusiasm. Fervet, immen-

* The revival of these Poems, the commendation of Blackmore, and the censure of Pope, gave occasion to the following Epigram.

Similes habent labra leſtucas.

Yon Aſs in vain the flow'ry lawns invite ;
To mumble thistles his ſupreme delight.
Such is the Critic, who with wayward pride
To Blackmore gives the praife to Pope denied ;
Wakes Yalden's embers, joys in Pomfret's lay,
But ſickens at the heav'n-ſtrung lyre of Gray.

fusque ruit." This praise is finely expressed, but unhappily it is not just: what he says of the Threnodia may be applied to this poem also; "its first and obvious defect is the irregularity of its metre, to which the ears of that age, however, were accustomed. What is worse, it has neither tenderness nor dignity, it is neither magnificent nor pathetick. He seems to look round him for images, which he cannot find, and what he has he distorts by endeavouring to enlarge them." This is severe, but just criticism. It would be trifling and invidious to call the attention of the reader to the feeble efforts of Yalden's lyre; yet this Critic says that his Hymn to Darkneſs "is for the most part imagined with great vigour, and expressed with great propriety:—the tenth stanza is inexpressibly beautiful." I transcribe it for the satisfaction of the reader;

Thou doſt thy finiles impartially beſtow,
 And know'ſt no difference below,
 All things appear the ſame by thee,
 Though Light diſtinction makes, Thou giv'ſt equality.

These are the lyrical productions which Dr. Johnson commends; but he seems to have contented himself with a very inaccurate and unclassical idea of this composition, which long ago he thus expressed, "The imagination of the first authors of lyric poetry was vehement and rapid, and their knowledge various and extensive. Living in an age when science had been but little cultivated, and when the minds of their auditors, not being accustomed to accurate inspection, were easily dazzled by glaring ideas, they applied themselves to instruct rather by short sentences and striking thoughts,

thoughts, than by regular argumentation ; and finding attention more successfully excited by sudden fallies and unexpected exclamations, than by the more artful and placid beauties of methodical deduction, they loosed their genius to its own course, passed from one sentiment to another without expressing the intermediate ideas, and roved at large over the ideal world with such lightness and agility that their footsteps are scarcely to be traced. From this accidental peculiarity of the antient writers the criticks deduce the rules of lyric Poetry, which they have set free from all the laws by which other compositions are confined, and allow to neglect the niceties of transition, to start into remote digressions, and to wander without restraint from one scene of imagery to another."—Rambler, N° 158.

This surely is a very unscholarlike account. The first Lyric Poets, whose fine productions have escaped the devastations of time, felt the poetic enthusiasm in an high degree ; they wrote not in barbarous times, but in the most enlightened age of Greece ; they did not attempt to dazzle by glaring ideas and sudden fallies, but they knew that rapture, not argumentation, was the constituent part of that species of poetry which they cultivated. The Ode originally was a sacred composition, and employed in celebrating the praises of the gods ; hence that religious air of solemn grandeur which in a manner hallows the performance ; sometimes it was of the prophetic cast, and of course assumed a mysterious and awful obscurity ; in these the sublime genius of Æschylus is unrivaled. It then descended to sing the actions of Demi-
 gods

gods and Heroes : this was the province of Pindar, and his excellence in it is inimitable ;

Ἀναξιφόρμιγγες ὕμνοι,
 Τίνα θεὸν, τιν' ἥρωα,
 Τίνα δ' ἄνδρα κελαδήσομεν ;

Hence it appears that this composition not only allowed, but even required sudden and bold transitions, and the highest flights of imagination to which even the Epic Muse dared not aspire : she prescribed laws to herself, which confined her to one great action ; and she pursues her plan with grave dignity : but the Lyric is a Muse of fire that rises on the wings of Extasy, and follows her Hero or her God from one glorious action to another, from earth to heaven. Yet we are unjust to these great writers, if we suppose that they gave a loose to their genius, and roved at random over the ideal world ; they had judgement as well as imagination ; and though they disdained to be in subjection to rules which have no relation to their province, yet they have their specific laws which they never transgress. Sublimity is the essential and characteristic perfection of the Ode ; where this can be attained by “ the placid beauties of methodical deduction,” that artful course is pursued ; but it is more often seized by a rapid and impetuous transition ; yet this is always under the controul of some nice connexion, is never vague and wanton, never loses sight of its important object. The Ode is daring, but not licentious ; though it is great, it disclaims “ the proud irregularity of greatness.”

Collins

Collins was the first of our poets that reached its excellence : his mind was impressed with a tender melancholy, but without any mixture of that fullen gloom which deadens its powers ; it led him to the softest sympathy, that most refined feeling of the human heart ; his faculties were vigorous, and his genius truly sublime ; his style is close and strong, and his numbers in general harmonious. He was well acquainted with Æschylus and Euripides, and drew deep from their fountains : his thoughts had a romantic cast, and his imagination a certain wild grandeur, which sometimes perhaps approaches to the borders of extravagance ; but this led him to descriptions and allegories wonderfully poetical ; such for instance is the Antistrophe in his Ode to Liberty, and the first part of his Ode to Fear ; Æschylus himself has not a bolder conception, and the grandeur of thought is as greatly expressed. Dr. Johnson speaks of this sublime Poet with a tenderness which reflects honour on himself ; he allows him sometimes to have sublimity and splendor, but in the coldness of criticism expresses some disapprobation of his allegorical imagery, and is unjust to his harmony.

The want of a good taste in a professed Critic is a mental blindness which totally incapacitates him for the discharge of the high office he has assumed ; but the want of good manners is an offence against those laws of decorum which, by guarding the charities of society, render our intercourse with each other agreeable : yet there is in some persons a blunt and surly humour, which prides itself in despising these laws of civility ; and often with an awkward affectation of pleasantry they play their rude gambols to make mirth, and

Wallowing unwieldy, enormous in their gait,
 Tempest the ocean.

To whatever liberal motive this conduct may possibly be imputed, we are told by an excellent writer that “ there is a certain expression of style and behaviour which verges towards barbarism; and that it is a degree of barbarism to ascribe nobleness of mind to arrogance of phrase or insolence of manners.” If there is a writer who, more than others, has a claim to be exempted from this pelting petulance, Mr. Gray has that claim: his own polished manners restrained him from ever giving offence to any good man, his warm and chearful benevolence endeared him to all his friends; though he lived long in a college, he lived not *sullenly* there, but in a liberal intercourse with the wisest and most virtuous men of his time; he was perhaps the most learned man of the age, but his mind never contracted the rust of pedantry; he had too good an understanding to neglect that urbanity which renders society pleasing; his conversation was instructing, elegant, and agreeable; superior knowledge, an exquisite taste in the fine arts, and above all purity of morals and an unaffected reverence for religion made this excellent person an ornament to society and an honour to human nature.

From this pleasing recollection of the merits of the man I now turn to his Lyric Poetry, in which he shines with superior lustre. His Ode on the Spring has an elegance of composition, an harmony of numbers, a richness of fancy, and a glow of colouring not to be found in any other writer; it is in the brightest manner of Pindar, and has reached perfection by

blending with those vivid images, the softest shades of melancholy morality; it resembles the beautiful and virtuous Andromache, in her interview with Hector, smiling through her tears. "This Ode, says the Critic, has something poetical both in the language and the thought; but the language is too luxuriant, and the thoughts have nothing new.—The morality is natural, but too stale; the conclusion is pretty." Had the language been less luxuriant, the Ode had been less beautiful, and less adapted to the smiling season. The Thoughts, considered separately, may not be new; but who has ever combined such an assemblage of poetical images, and clothed them in such a splendid diction? Others may have contemplated the race of man and the insect youth as fluttering alike through life's little day; but who has represented the gaudy insect as retorting on the moralist in a vein of philosophy, so peculiarly suitable to the sportive kind? The images of Nature have for ages worn the same form, and the sober eye of Contemplation may always have viewed them in the same light; but the poet's skill in selecting, disposing, and adorning them gives them all the grace of novelty. The Critic objects to one word in this Ode; "there has of late, says he, arisen a practice of giving to adjectives, derived from substantives, the termination of participles; but I was sorry to see, in the lines of a scholar like Gray, the *bonied* spring." Our language derives much grace and strength from conversions of a like nature, and has long been in possession of this word, which it is likely to retain upon the authority of Shakespear and Milton, at least till its impropriety be better proved. It is observable that the Latin language has its *mellitus*, formed upon

the same construction, and its purest and most correct writers scrupled not to make use of it.

A distant prospect of Eton College inspires the Poet with that enthusiasm, which marks the genius of Lyric Poetry; in a glow of rapture he addresses the holy Henry's towers, and those that crown the stately heights of Windsor, the hills, the groves, the fields over which he had so often strayed: the gales, which breathe from them, sooth his soul, and give him a momentary sensation of joy and youth. In the same glow of enthusiasm he asks Father Thames what youths are now bathing in his stream, or sporting on his banks: this happy race he follows through their paths of pleasure with the most enchanting strains of poetry; but at length looks beyond their present cheerful and thoughtless day to the various afflictions which may embitter their future life; these he pathetically describes, and concludes with a moral reflection on the various sufferings of mankind, and the folly of inquiring into distant ills, the knowledge of which would destroy present happiness. Yet Dr. Johnson says "the Prospect of Eton College suggests nothing to Gray, which every beholder does not equally think and feel." How great is that sagacity, which discovers the thoughts and feelings of others before they are declared? But the Critic perhaps only means, as before, that the thoughts have nothing new: on this subject a candid and judicious inquirer says, "in any supposed combination of circumstances one train of thought is, generally, most obvious, and occurs soonest to the understanding; and it being the office of poetry to present the most *natural* appearances, one cannot be much surprized to find a coincidence of reflection."—On Poetical

Imitation.—The affectation of new thoughts is too apt to divert the mind from the simple and genuine appearances of things, and usually produces quaint and far-fetched conceits; as the Painter, who disdains to copy Nature or to follow the great masters of design, aims at a manner of his own, and instead of the umbrageous pine or the knotty hardihood of the giant oak, gives us strait and slender stems, a poverty of foliage, and a colouring which Nature never knew. Mr. Gray had too good an understanding and too fine a taste to be a Manierist. The Critic proceeds, “ His supplication to Father Thames to tell him who drives the hoop or tosses the ball, is useless and puerile. Father Thames has no better means of knowing than himself.” Criticism of this nature breathes a frigid air, which chills all the faculties of genius. These impersonations and addresses to woods, mountains and streams,

Omnia quæ Phœbo quondam meditante, beatus
Audiit Eurotas, jussitque ediscere lauros,

give to poetry a peculiar animation, and constitutes one of her greatest beauties; every thing hears her voice. Of that tender apostrophe of Æneas to the ashes of Troy,

Iliaci cineres, et flamma extrema meorum,
Testor, in occasu vestro nec tela, nec ullos
Vitavisse vices Danaûm, &c.

shall it be said that they could bear no testimony to his pious valour, and had no better means of knowing it than Dido herself? Shall we lop from Milton that sublime address of Satan to the Sun as useless and puerile, because the Sun had

no means of hearing his call? Or rather shall we not, without regard to the opposition of this arbitrary Critic, leave the free people of Parnassus their antient right of addressing the kings of the floods, and other poetical sovereigns?—"His epithet *buxom* health, the Critic says, is not elegant; he seems not to understand the word." Milton thought the word at least not inelegant; he has used it twice, perhaps in different senses. I leave Dr. Johnson to settle its precise meaning with that respectable dealer in words Dr. Adam Littleton. Of Mr. Gray's language I shall have occasion to speak elsewhere.

The Hymn to Adversity has in a supreme degree every excellence which dignifies this species of poetry. It opens, like the finest Odes of the great masters of antiquity, with an address to the goddess, and enumerates her awful attributes in a strain truly sublime; it then represents Jupiter as sending his darling child, Virtue, to be trained by this rugged Nurse, before whose frown Folly's idle brood disperse; but Wisdom, Melancholy, Charity, Justice, and Pity attend her steps: it concludes with a supplication to the goddess not to appear in her Gorgon terrors, nor surrounded with her vengeful band; but to wear her more benign form, and bring her milder train, whose influence softens, not wounds the heart. The solemnity of these sentiments is ennobled by a grandeur of imagery, and the dignity of expression receives new graces from the sober harmony of the lyre. "Of this Hymn, we are told, the hint was at first taken from

O Diva, gratum quæ regis Antium;

but

but Gray has excelled his original by the variety of his sentiments, and by their moral application." Mr. Gray has told us that the hint was taken from *Antistrophe I.* of the first choral ode in the *Agamemnon* of *Æschylus*; and it is in the true spirit of that sublime author: the third stanza indeed catches a feature from the *Ode to Fortune*, but it is highly improved and dignified. "Of this piece, at once poetical and rational, I will not, says the Critic, by slight objections violate the dignity." This is a gracious forbearance, considering his alacrity in censuring: but it must be observed that this penurious praise is all that is afforded to three beautiful and sublime Odes: critical observations, which only aim to point out the defects, but overlook the beauties of an author, may be deemed fastidious, certainly they are not candid.

I have before said that the *Ode on the Spring* is in the brightest manner of *Pindar*; and that the *Hymn to Adversity* is in the true spirit of *Æschylus*: this may require an explanation. The Odes of the latter writer are accompaniments to his Tragic Muse, and as they attend her through the awful scenes of misery, terror, vengeance, and blood, they take their colouring from thence; they become religious inquiries into the dispensations of the gods, or melancholy reflections on the instability of human greatness, or obscure predictions or gloomy presages of the dreadful catastrophe of the drama: the elevated genius of the author has often given them a terrible sublimity. The English reader is now, or may be, well acquainted with this great writer; it is therefore unnecessary to extend this observation further. *Pindar* was employed in a more pleasing, at least in a more chearful task; his Muse was courted to cele-

brate the victors in the public games of Greece ; his Odes are festal songs recounting glories, conquests, and joy ; they take their colouring from their subject ; every thing in them is splendid, animated, and gay ; or if at any time he is led to consider adverse fortune, or the vanity of human life, the reflection is generally short, he soon returns to his usual cheerfulness, and every thing around, like the face of Nature after a shower, becomes more fresh, more bright, and more smiling : his genius at the same time was impetuous and rapid, and carried him to the noblest heights of the sublime. That the English reader may be enabled to form some idea of this Poet's manner, however imperfect, I have ventured to give a translation of one of his Odes ; those, who are acquainted with the original, will be sensible of the difficulty of the task.

Mr. Gray calls the Progress of Poetry a Pindaric Ode : how happily he has imitated the smiling beauty, as well as the great manner of his master, may easily be seen. The first Stanza rolls along in the fervor of enthusiasm, various, sweet, and magnificent as its subject. Dr. Johnson says “ he is one of those that are willing to be pleased, and therefore would gladly find the meaning of this first Stanza.” Had the Critic been pleased to find the meaning of Horace, he could not have failed of finding the same pleasure from this passage, the high metaphorical expressions of which are drawn from thence ;

Monte decurrens velut amnis, imbres
 Quem super notas aluere ripas,
 Fervet, immensusque ruit profundo
 Pindarus ore ;

Laureâ donandus Apollinari,
 Seu per audaces nova dithyrambos
 Verba devolvit, numerisque fertur
 Lege solutis.

So Cowley styles it an unnavigable song ; and the Poet here tells us, that “ the subject and simile, as usual with Pindar, are united ;” a beautiful and sublime instance of which we have in the opening of the sixth Olympic Ode, to which I refer the learned reader. So much for the Critic’s charge of confusion, nonsense, and impertinence in this Stanza. In the second, the address to the Enchanting Shell is truly Pindaric, and its power to controul the frantic Passions is expressed in the noble imagery of that sublime author : yet the Critic says “ the second Stanza, exhibiting Mars’s car and Jove’s eagle, is unworthy of further notice. Criticism disdains to chase a school-boy to his common places.” Criticism needs not be so disdainful. When the antient Mythology is introduced into times, and manners, and subjects, to which it has no relation, it is puerile and justly reprehensible ; but there are occasions and circumstances which seem to require its use ; and in these to deny it a place is unreasonable prejudice, particularly as it abounds with poetical images, of which we have two fine instances in this Stanza. The allusions of this Ode are of classical antiquity ; the car of Mars and * the eagle of Jupiter have

* Mr. Gray modestly says, “ this is a weak imitation of some incomparable lines in the first Pythian of Pindar.” This was not said without reason: the Eagle is there fixed upon the sceptre of Jupiter ; the image should have been preserved.

have the stamp of the same times with the Æolian lyre and the springs of Helicon.

The third Stanza charms us with a delightful assemblage of gay ideas;

Softly sweet, in Lydian measures,
Soon he sooth'd the soul to pleasures;

and shows that he is equally master of those airs which “ lap the land in extasy,” as of that dreadful harmony which appalls the soul; here, if ever, the Graces strung the lyre; *σὺν ἑαθυζώνοις: Χαριτεσσι γεγωνεῖ*. Even Dr. Johnson acknowledges that this Stanza “ has something pleasing.” But it is not allowed to pass uncensured. “ Idalia’s *velvet-green* has something of cant. An epithet or metaphor drawn from Nature ennobles Art; an epithet or metaphor drawn from Art degrades

With ruffled plumes, and flagging wing,
does not well express *ὠκείαν πτέρυγ’ ἀμφοτέρωθεν χάλαξαις*.

*ὁ δὲ κνώσων
ὕγρον νῶτον αἰωρεῖ, τεῦξις
ρίπῃσι καλᾶσχομένος,*

is an appropriated image, which shows that the poet looked at nature with a painter’s eye; it is omitted in the imitation. But in justice to Mr. Gray it must be acknowledged that his two last lines,

Quench’d in dark clouds of slumber lie
The terror of his beak, and light’nings of his eye,

are at least equal to the great original: the image of Mars is far superior: the hills of Thrace judiciously fix the locality in learned allusion to the Rhodopean Orpheus; the representation of the god curbing the fury of his car, and dropping his lance, is Mr. Gray’s own.

Nature.”

Nature." What then becomes of the vitrea unda, of the pictæ volucres, of the gay enamel'd colours of blossoms and fruits, of the embroider'd vale, the fringed banks, and all those beautiful images drawn from Art, with which the best writers antient and modern have embellished Nature? The Arts in their infancy were obliged to borrow many terms from their rich parent Nature; but as they advanced to maturity, they amply repaid the loan; from that time the metaphor and the metonymy have ranged at will from Nature to Art, and from Art to Nature; and as it is the province of Art to adorn Nature, so the terms of Art have the same happy effect in enriching language. On this head Dr. Johnson will perhaps pay some deference to the authority of the learned Critic, who, comparing the style of Dryden with that of Pope, says " Dryden's page is a natural field, rising into inequalities, and diversified by the varied exuberance of abundant vegetation; Pope's is a *velvet lawn*, shaven by the scythe, and levelled by the roller."

The Critic proceeds. " Of the second ternary of stanzas, the first endeavours to tell something, and would have told it, had it not been crossed by Hyperion." He seems not to understand the Poet, though the meaning of the passage is clearly explained in a note subjoined to it. From the pleasing ideas and captivating melody of the foregoing Stanza the attention of the reader is called in a graver strain to the ills which attend human life; yet even these, the Poet tells us, are cheared by the Muse, as the sickly dews and spectres of the night are dispelled by the rising sun: he therefore does tell us something, and something very much to the purpose; this stanza expresses a

philosophical truth with poetic elegance, and the classical image of Hyperion crosses nothing, but is crossed by the perverse spirit of sombrous Criticism.

“ The second Stanza, says the Critic, describes well enough the universal prevalence of Poetry ; but I am afraid that the conclusion will not rise from the premises. The caverns of the North and the plains of Chili are not the residences of *Glory* and *generous Shame*.” This is not said, nor even implied. The general position is “ the extensive influence of poetic genius over the remotest and most uncivilized nations.” The fragments of the Northern Bards here referred to, and particularly the Poems of Ossian, (which, whoever was their author, founded from the caverns of the North) not only cheered the shivering native’s dull abode, but breathe the high spirit of *Glory* and *Liberty*. The Muse too deigns to hear the savage youth on the plains of Chili raise his wild notes to War and Love, with both which *Glory* and *Liberty* are in close connexion ; so that the conclusion will arise from the premises, “ *Liberty*, and the virtues that naturally attend on it, pursue the track of Poetry.”

And this is a fine introduction to the next Stanza, which tells us that in the evil hour of slavery the Muses left their Greece for the Latian plains ; and that disdaining to dwell there with tyrant power and coward vice they next sought the sea-encircled coast of Albion. The sighs of Greece for the loss of *Liberty* and the Muses are expressed in such a sober strain of mournful melody as softens and subdues the soul. Of this the Critic says “ the third stanza sounds big with *Delphi*, and *Egean*, and *Ilissus*, and *Meander*, and *ballow’d fountain*, and
solemn

solemn found ; but in all Gray's Odes there is a kind of cumbersome splendor which we wish away." In like manner Virgil sounds big with Groves, and Forests, and Nais, and Parnassus, and Aonia, and Aganippe ;

Quæ nemora, aut qui vos saltus habuere, puellæ
 Naiades, indigno cum Gallus amore periret ?
 Nam neque Parnassi vobis juga, nam neque Pindi
 Ulla moram fecere, neque Aonia Aganippe.

Milton imitates this big language,

Where were ye, Nymphs, when the remorseless deep
 Clos'd o'er the head of your lov'd Lycidas ?
 For neither were ye playing on the steep,
 Where your old Bards, the famous Druids, lie,
 Nor on the shaggy top of Mona high,
 Nor yet where Deva spreads her wifard stream.

The Bard Maſon too muſt be poetical, and claſſical, and talk big ; witneſs his addreſs to the Muſes,

Stay then awhile, O ſtay, ye fleeting fair ;
 Reviſit yet nor hallow'd Hippocrene,
 Nor Theſpiæ's groves ; till with harmonious teen
 Ye ſooth his ſhade, and ſlowly-dittied air.
 Such tribute pour'd, again ye may repair
 To what lov'd haunt ye whilom did elect ;
 Whether Lycæus, or that mountain fair,

Trim Mænalus, with piny verdure deckt.
 But now it boots you not in these to stray,
 Or yet Cyllene's hoary shade to chuse,
 Or where mild Ladon's welling waters play.

I make no apology for the length of these quotations; the lines of each poet are enchantingly sweet, and their beauties were universally admired, till in good time Dr. Johnson arose to correct the public taste. Yet, before we extinguish this splendor, cumbrous as it may be deemed, let me presume to suggest to his consideration that it is of the essence of Poetry to give locality to persons and things: thus Apollo is bathing his locks in the pure dews of Castalia, or rejoicing in his native Delos; the Muses are Aonian or Pierian; the lyre is Lesbian or Æolian; the bow is Parthian; the arrow Cydonian, and the sword a rude barbarian from the mines of Scythia: the classic Muse delights in this pomp of diction; it is the robe of state with which she arrays her self, and let no rude hand presume to rend it from her.

An heavier charge is next prepared against the Poet: "his position is at last false: in the time of Dante and Petrarch, from whom he derives our first school of Poetry, Italy was over-run by *tyrant power* and *coward vice*; nor was our state much better when we first borrowed the Italian arts." This could not have been said but through a total misconception of the Poet's historical deduction, which, in few words, is this, "When Constantinople submitted to the arms of Mahomet the Great, Athens and all Greece were enslaved by the conquering Turks; this fatal event drove many of the most
 learned

learned Greeks into Italy, where they were liberally encouraged by the Popes and the illustrious House of Medici, under whose patronage literature and the fine arts flourished for awhile : thus the Muses

Left their Parnassus for the Latian plains ;

but finding them over-run with tyrant power and coward vice, they disdained to fix their residence there, and sought a refuge in England : happily they found it : the long reign of Edward III. was an æra of glory ; that of his unhappy son was strongly marked with the high spirit of liberty ; in those times Chaucer lived and flourished, greatly favoured by both those kings.” This justifies the truth of Mr. Gray’s position ; his conclusion no friend to virtue and literature will controvert.

The first English Poet here mentioned is Shakespear. What the Critic says of the mythological birth given him arises from a mistake : Milton indeed has done this, where he calls him *Fancy’s Child* ; Mr. Gray says nothing of his birth ; he styles him Nature’s Darling, and says that *the* Mighty Mother unveiled her awful face to him when a child ; to signify the glow of his imagination, she is represented as giving him a pencil ; whose colours richly paint the vernal year ; and, to express his power over the passions, two golden keys, one of which unlocks the gates of joy, the other those of terror and pity : this is happily conceived, and expressed with clear and elegant simplicity. The seraphic sublimity of Milton is greatly characterised. “ The car of Dryden, says the Critic, with his two coursers, has nothing in it peculiar ; it is a car
in

in which any other rider may be placed." More judgement as well as candor had been shown in pointing out the Pindaric imagery, and observing that this car is borne wide over the fields of glory by

Two courfers of ethereal race,
With necks in thunder cloath'd, and long-refounding pace.

The mention of Dryden's Ode in honour of St. Cecilia's day is unnoticed : the richness of imagination, the felicity of expression, and the sweetness of numbers, with which that noble torrent of enthusiasm is celebrated, could not extort praise, but they strike censure dumb. The latter part of this concluding stanza shows at least that Mr. Gray had the uncommon happiness to speak of himself with grace ; but it is the province of the Critic to place him in that high station in the realms of Poetry, which his own modesty would not allow him to assume.

From the most elegant and most pleasing we come now to the grandest and sublimest effort of the Lyric Muse : forcible conception, a fervor of enthusiasm, and a terrible greatness characterise the Bard. They, who think it an imitation of the Prophecy of Nereus, depreciate this Ode through a partial fondness for antiquity ; it is the genuine production of Mr. Gray's vigorous genius, animated perhaps by some wonderful passages of Æschylus. But the supposition serves well enough to introduce Dr. Johnson's cold and tasteless Criticism. " To copy, says he, is less than to invent, and the copy has been unhappily produced at a wrong time. The fiction of Horace was to the Romans credible ; but its revival disgusts us with
apparent

apparent and unconquerable falsehood. To select a singular event, and swell it to a giant's bulk by fabulous appendages of spectres and predictions, has little difficulty, for he that forsakes the probable may always find the marvellous." And again, "in the third stanza we have the puerilities of obsolete mythology. When we are told that *Cadwallo hush'd the stormy main*, and that *Modred made huge Plinlimmon bow his cloud top'd head*, attention recoils from the repetition of a tale that, even when it was first heard, was heard with scorn." The misfortune is, this Critic is for regulating poetic imagination by the standard of methodical argumentation and philosophical truth; as if the excursions of Shakespear's fancy were to be measured by the theorems of Euclid. Fiction is the province of this kind of poetry, which delights in the marvellous that barely comes within the verge of possibility: it has an ideal world of its own peopled with imaginary beings, and builds its agreeable delusions on the light foundations of fancy, popular belief, old traditions, and vulgar superstitions; hence, as a fine writer observes *, "the Poet, who can give to splendid inventions and to fictions new and bold, the air and authority of reality and truth, is master of the genuine sources of the Castalian spring, and may justly be said to draw his inspiration from the *well-head of pure poetry*."

On these principles the antients allowed the mythological fictions of their Poets, though in reality no more credible to them than later superstitions are to us; and in all ages popular belief has been the allowable foundation of poetic fiction.

* Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespear.

“Even when a popular opinion has long been exploded, and has become repugnant to universal belief, the fictions built upon it are still admitted as natural, because (says the * philosophical Critic) they were accounted such by the people to whom they were first addressed; whose sentiments and views of things we are willing to adopt, when, by the power of pleasing description, we are introduced into their scenes, and made acquainted with their manners.” Wretched as the mythology in Ossian’s Poems is, attention recoils not from the delirious fancy, but we feel ourselves impressed with the ideas of the Northern Bard, and even catch his enthusiasm: I envy not the heart that can turn, with an incredulus odi, from images like this, “Trenmor came from his hill at the voice of his mighty Son. A cloud, like the steed of the stranger, supported his airy limbs. His robe is like the mist of Lano, that brings death to the people. His sword is a green meteor half-extinguished. His face is without form, and dark. He sighed thrice over the Hero; and thrice the winds of the night roared around.”—The war of Caros.—

On these principles we admit the Spirit of the Cape in the *Lusiad* of Camoens, the Witches and Fairies of Shakespear, his aerial Beings attendant on Prospero, and the delicate machinery of the Sylphs in the *Rape of the Lock*.

Sans tous ces ornemens le vers tombe en langueur ;
 La Poésie est morte, ou rampe sans vigueur :
 Le poëte n’ est plus qu’ un orateur, timide,
 Qu’ un froid historien d’ une fable insipide.—Boileau.

* Dr. Beattie’s Essay on Poetry &c. Part I. ch. II.

But this subject, particularly as it relates to Gothic and Celtic superstitions and manners, has been treated with so much precision and elegance by the two best Critics of this or any other age, that one is astonished to find a person, who has read the Letters on Chivalry, and the Discourse on Præternatural Beings in the Essay on the Genius and Writings of Shakespear, speaking with contempt of the Magnanima Menfogna of the Bard.

The Critic seems almost to have contented himself with his general censure of the poetic fiction; he makes but few objections to particular passages of this Ode; and these are in the same spirit of arbitrary and unmannered Criticism. "The Stanzas, he says, are too long, especially his Epodes." Pindar has many longer. "Of the first stanza the abrupt beginning has been celebrated; but technical beauties can give praise only to the inventor." The rules of Art are deduced from original beauties, and all beauties will give praise to every writer, who uses them with judgement. It is the praise of Homer that he hurries his reader in medias res non secus ac notas: does the same artful management devolve no praise on Virgil, because the beauty is technical? Mr. Gray's Ode must have a beginning; if he has formed it with judgement, if it is such as the situation of the Bard seems to require, it has been justly celebrated. But "it is in the power of any man to rush abruptly upon his subject, that has read the ballad of Johnny Armstrong,

Is there ever a man in all Scotland ——"

The Critic here affects to be pleasant,

asper

Incolumi gravitate jocum tentavit :

it is equally in the power of any man to rush upon a rude jest, who does not feel abashed at offending against delicacy and good manners.

“ The initial resemblances, or alliterations, *ruin, rutblefs, helm nor hauberk*, are below the grandeur of a poem that endeavours at sublimity.” Of this figure, for with that name it has been dignified, much might be said, much has been said, and enough for every good purpose by the late excellent Mr. Harris in his *Philological Inquiries*. Part II. Ch. iv. Perhaps this concurrence of the letters was merely accidental ; be that as it will, the words are the most proper for the Poet’s purpose of any in our language ; and surely it would have been a ridiculous affectation in him to have gone out of his way and have chosen worse, because these happened to have initial resemblances. After all, what occasion of censure do they give ? Should Dr. Johnson reprobate the second lines of these beautiful couplets,

New sorrow rises, as the day returns,

A sister sickens, or a daughter mourns.

Vanity of Human Wishes.

Ye glitt’ring train ! whom Lace and Velvet bless,

Suspend the soft sollicitudes of dress.

Prologue to Irene.

Our daring Bard, with spirit unconfin’d,

Spreads wide the mighty moral for mankind. — Ib.

no person, who has an ear, would take part with the Critic. But these lines, it may be said, affect not grandeur, endeavour not at sublimity. Let us then turn to such as do, and hear the heroic Leontius,

And is it thus Demetrius meets his friend,
Hid in the mean disguise of Turkish robes,
With servile secrecy to lurk in shades——

Again,

The groaning Greeks break up their golden caverns——
Once more,

The dreadful dissonance of barb'rous triumph —
Nor must we omit the Moral of this tragedy,
Weak man with erring rage may throw the dart,
But heav'n shall guide it to the guilty heart.

The weaving of the winding sheet Mr. Gray borrows, as he owns, from the Northern Bards ; therefore it is not, what this Critic's harsh language styles it, *Theft*. He describes the slaughtered Bards as weaving the web ; but was this *work of death* only proper for women, because in another mythology *the thread of life* was spun by female hands ? Is the fiction outrageous and incongruous, which was adopted from the wild but animated ideas of the Bards of those times ? — Whether the Poet has used the words *warp* and *woof* with propriety we shall be able to judge when Dictionary-makers shall have settled the precise meaning of those terms ; in the mean time the public probably will not think itself deeply interested in the question.

I cannot quit this subject without taking a review of the Ode. The Bard, as Dr. Beattie, who caught the enthusiasm of the Poet, finely observes, “just escaped from the Massacre of his brethren, under the complicated agitations of grief, revenge, and despair, and surrounded with the scenery of rocks, mountains, and torrents, stupendous by nature, and now rendered hideous by desolation, imprecates perdition upon the bloody Edward.” The effect of this imprecation on the tyrant and his warrior chiefs is greatly represented by images of varied terror; the king’s crested pride was dismayed;

Stout Glo’ster stood aghast in speechless trance:

To arms! cried Mortimer, and couch’d his quiv’ring lance.

The description of the Bard adds to the great ideas of Raphael and Milton a wild dignity of sorrow which strikes us with awe. His lamentations over his slaughtered brethren call for revenge in strains of dreadful harmony. Amidst these woe-wild notes he sees their spirits sitting on a distant cliff, and weaving the ample winding-sheet of Edward’s race; on this, “seized with prophetic enthusiasm, he foretells in the most alarming strains, and typifies by the most dreadful images, the disasters that were to overtake his family and descendants.” And now, “The work is done.” The airy images melt away in a track of light that fires the western skies. Yet other visions, visions of glory, now burst upon his sight; he beholds in a prophetic extasy a succession of genuine kings, of the line of Tudor, regain their sovereignty; the deep sorrows of his lyre are now changed to measures of transport and rapture; he hails the Bards of future times, whose voices

reach

reach his ear, and with strains of defiance and triumph, seeing his death inevitable, (like the poor mariner that leaps from his burning ship into the sea) to preserve himself from the outrages of his enemies he plunges from the mountain's height into the roaring tide below.

The wild and romantic scenery, the strength of conception, the boldness of the figures, the terrible sublimity, the solemn spirit of prophecy, and the animated glow of visions of glory render this "the finest Ode in the world." The language of Gray is always pure, peculiarly compact and nervous, ever appropriated to his subject; when that is gay and smiling, his diction is elegant and glittering; in the sober reflections of faintly melancholy it is grave and solemn; and it rises with an elevated dignity along with the boldest flights of his sublime imagination; and his numbers, regulated by a fine taste and a nice ear, have through all their various modulations a rich and copious harmony. Gray inherited the ample pinion of the Theban Eagle, and sails with supreme dominion through the azure deep of air; but he never sinks to that humiliating lowness to which not want of genius, but the poverty of his subject often depresses the Theban's fluttering pennons: he therefore has a claim to the highest rank in the realms of Lyric Poetry. This testimony to his merit would from any lover of literature have been an act of justice; but from the translator of *Æschylus*, who owes so much to him, it is a debt of Gratitude.

What could induce Dr. Johnson, who as a good man might be expected to favour goodness, as a scholar to be candid to a man of learning, to attack this excellent person and poet with

such

such outrage and indecency, we can only conjecture from this observation, “ there must be a certain sympathy between the book and the reader to create a good liking.” Now it is certain that the Critic has nothing of this sympathy, no portion nor sense of that *vivida vis animi*, that ethereal flame which animates the poet ; he is therefore as little qualified to judge of these works of imagination, as the shivering inhabitant of the caverns of the North to form an idea of the glowing sun that flames over the plains of Chili.

Dr. Johnson knows well that “ all Truth is valuable, and that satyrical criticism may be considered as useful, when it rectifies error and improves judgement ; he that refines the publick taste is a publick benefactor.” Under this idea he will value the truth of these observations ; and upon a more careful review of this Ode of Gray he will perhaps discover that it has some little use, that it promotes one truth ; “ it makes kings fear to be tyrants, tyrants to manifest their tyrannical humours.” Few indeed are the pages any where to be found from which some useful instruction may not be derived by those who are disposed to receive it ; even these may be a lesson to literary tyrants to bear their faculties meekly, to favour the Progress of Poetry, and to spare the Bard.

THE NINTH
PYTHIAN ODE

OF

PINDAR

TRANSLATED.

THE NINTH
PYTHIAN ODE
OF
PINDAR.

TO TELESICRATES of CYRENE,
VICTOR IN THE FOOT RACE IN ARMOUR.

STROPHE I.

HIGH the willing song I raise,
The deep-zon'd Graces aid the strain
Tun'd to the Pythian victor's praise,
His brazen shield borne o'er the plain.
Blest Youth, Cyrene's pride and grace,
Fam'd for her manag'd coursers gen'rous race.
Her once in Pelion's rustling vales,
His loose locks streaming to the wanton gales,

Apollo seiz'd ; and thence convey'd
 To Libya's pastur'd plains, and cultur'd fields,
 High on his golden car the huntress maid ;
 To the lov'd Fair those blooming regions yields ;
 Fixes her seat in that delightful land,
 A third of Earth's firm globe beneath her soft command.

A N T I S T R O P H E.

Silver-sandal'd Venus there
 Her hand with courteous grace addrest,
 And lightly touch'd the heav'n-wrought car,
 Proud to receive her Delian guest ;
 Then their sweet bridal bed t'adorn
 Sent Modesty soft-blushing like the Morn ;
 Thus to the god his virgin bride,
 From wide-commanding Hypseus sprung, affied.
 He, from the monarch of the main
 The second in descent, illustrious name,
 Held o'er the haughty Lapithæ his reign :
 Him in the vales of Pindus known to fame
 A Naid, Nymph from Gaia sprung, of yore
 Of her Penæus proud the fond Creusa bore.

E P O D E.

Beneath his royal roof
 The fair Cyrene's opening bloom
 The monarch nurtur'd with a parent's pride :
 Her nor the labours of the loom,
 While through the trembling woof
 The quick-returning shuttle learns to glide,

Nor the rich pleasures of the feast
 Amidst the female band, delight :
 But the bright spear, the arrow wing'd for flight,
 And in the chace to pierce the savage beast ;
 That safe through pastur'd mead and grove
 Her father's herds in peace might rove :
 At morn's approach she seeks a short repose ;
 Sleep on her couch attends her willing eyes to close.

S T R O P H E II.

Her the distant-wounding god,
 His quiver rattling by his side
 As down the rocky steep he trod,
 With a fierce lion grappling spied ;
 Alone he saw the virgin stand,
 Nor spear nor falchion arm'd her daring hand :
 To Chiron strait his voice addrest,
 Haste, Son of Philyra, at my request
 Come from thy venerable cave ;
 See and admire this virgin ; undismaid
 See that fair form the dang'rous conflict brave,
 A force, a spirit above the toil display'd :
 Say from what root this lovely plant is sprung,
 Sweet-blooming 'midst these crags with darksome shades
 o'erhung.

A N T I S T R O P H E.

Ardent see her noble fire
 Amidst the fierce encounter glow.

Indulgent to my fond desire
 My hand will Heav'n's just Pow'r allow
 To seize her, and in this blest hour
 Crop from its verdant stalk this honied flow'r ?
 With aspect mild and courteous grace,
 A conscious smile bright-glowing on his face,
 The gen'rous Centaur thus replied,
 Persuasion is the key of hallow'd Love ;
 That can unlock the secrets this would hide ;
 Alike in men below, in gods above,
 When first they feel the soul-enkindling flame,
 A modest awe forbids their soft desire to name.

E P O D E.

Thee, to whom Falsehood's tongue
 Dares not the guileful fable feign,
 Thy gentle manners thus to speak incline.
 Dost thou, O royal Phoebus, deign
 Ask whence this virgin sprung ?
 The destin'd end of all things it is thine,
 And all their various ways, to know :
 How many leaves in spring are seen
 Wave o'er the genial earth their chearful green ;
 Where the vast ocean beats, where rivers flow,
 How many sands the shores contain
 By wild winds roll'd or billowy main :
 Doth not thine eye whate'er the fates decree,
 Th' events of future times, and whence they spring, foresee ?

S T R O P H E III.

Must I vie then with the wife ?
 Then I will speak. The virgin bride,
 The bridegroom thou, thy lovely prize,
 From this rude vale art come to guide ;
 Her o'er the ocean shalt thou bear,
 And in Jove's fragrant garden place the Fair,
 Collected there the island train,
 Where the mount swells amidst th' encircling plain.
 In splendid mansions rich with gold
 Libya, for wide-extended meads renown'd,
 Exulting shall th' illustrious Nymph behold ;
 And, that on Laws an empire she may found,
 Part of her realms assign, her queen to grace,
 Not bare of fruitful plants, nor void of beasts of chace.

A N T I S T R O P H E.

There a fon shall crown thy love :
 Him from the raptur'd mother's care
 The noble Hermes shall remove,
 And to the * Hours and Gaia bear,
 Whose gorgeous seats their state display ;
 They on their knees the smiling babe shall lay,
 Shall Nectar through his lips distill,
 And with Ambrosia, food celestial, fill ;

* This is said with great propriety : as the Patron of agriculture he was to be instructed by the Hours quo fidere terram vertere ; by Gaia, arborum quæ robora cuique.

Immortal as his sacred fire,
 As Jove immortal shall they raise the boy ;
 Him shall his friends their dear delight admire,
 O'er spacious plains to lead the flocks his joy ;
 Thy Aristæus thus shall rise to fame,
 And him the Hunter some, and some the Shepherd
 name.

E P O D E.

His words enchanting found
 Swell the fond wish of rapt'rous love.
 Ardent the gods, disdaining cold delay,
 Swift by short ways to action move.
 That day his wishes crown'd.
 Around their couch the Loves in Libya play,
 Where o'er the stately-structur'd town,
 High fam'd on Pytho's sacred plain,
 The god delighted holds his guardian reign ;
 Whence Teleicrates now brings renown,
 And binds, whilst Fortune radiant glows,
 Fresh wreaths around Cyrene's brows ;
 Back to his country, feat to Beauty dear,
 Pleas'd she the victor sees the prize of glory bear.

S T R O P H E IV.

Virtues greatly eminent
 Swell the full pomp of copious praise :
 But he, the noble argument
 Who brief in splendid phrase displays,

Delights

Delights the wife : whate'er you trace,

* Occasion gives it energy and grace.

Thebes, for seven towred gates renown'd,

Saw Iolaus of old with glory crown'd ;

And when avenging barb'rous pride,

His falchion thunder'd on the tyrant's head,

Car-borne Amphitryon's honour'd tomb beside

Laid in her hallow'd earth the hero dead

His grandfire nigh : Thebes once the stranger's car

Saw 'midst her dragon race his snowy courfers bear.

* The conduct of the Poet in this Ode deserves our attention. He begins by declaring his desire to celebrate the victory of Teleficrates in the Pythian Games ; but conscious of the barrenness of his subject,

Exigua cum frænaret materia impetum,

after five lines he leaves his hero to record the history of the Nymph Cyrene, nor does he return to him till towards the middle of the third Epode, and in six lines more his praise is again interrupted. Though a reader of taste, not interested in the encomium, may not only forgive him, but be highly pleased with the very beautiful digression, yet he might well fear that Teleficrates would receive it otherwise, and, like the Pyæta to Simonides, bid him go to his Cyrene for his reward. This accounts for the reflection in the beginning of this Strophe, which is an artful and delicate apology for his own conduct in the preceding part of the Ode, where so much is given to Cyrene, and so little to Teleficrates : he then shows that the seasonable introduction of a circumstance is the crown of all praise, by an allusion to the story of Iolaus : nor is this hero introduced at random ; for, besides his near connexion with Hercules and his sons, whose descendents were among the first colonists at Cyrene, the circumstance of his being buried near the tomb of Amphitryon leads him naturally to the mention of Hercules and Iphicles, the institutors of the Games in which Teleficrates had been Conqueror : this brings him back to his first proposed design, *Πυθιονικᾶν Τελεσικράτη γεγωνεῖν*, which he then does amply, and with uncommon spirit : thus are his bold transitions well connected and coherent.

A N T I S T R O P H E.

Sprung from his and Jove's embrace
 Two sons, together giv'n to light,
 To high thoughts rais'd Alcmena grace,
 Sons of immense, unconquer'd might.
 Dumb is the tongue untaught to sound
 Thy name, Alcides, through the world renown'd;
 That sings not Dirce's streams, which roll'd
 To nurture thee and Iphicles of old:
 Grateful your praise will I display,
 Your bounties hymning high in founding strain:
 Mine ever be the Graces' brightest ray.
 The mount of Nifus, and Ægina's plain
 Saw thee thrice victor raise Cyrene's name,
 Nor dark Despair was thine, nor silent-grieving Shame.

E P O D E.

Cyrene's sons among
 Doth one with gen'rous friendship glow?
 Is there whose dark'ning bosom swells with hate?
 Free let them give his praise to flow,
 Roll the full tide along,
 And hail the labours glorious to the state:
 Praise e'en a foe who seeks renown
 By just and gen'rous deeds to gain;
 So taught the hoary prophet of the main.
 Thine, Teleficrates, th' Olympic crown;
 Thee victor oft Minerva's feast,
 Thy country oft with pride address;

Her

Her son each mother wish'd thee, and with sighs
 Silent each virgin felt Love's softest wish arise.

S T R O P H E V.

Me, though eager my desire
 Th' impetuous course of Song to rein,
 Hark ! hear you not a voice require
 Once more to roll the grateful strain,
 Great deeds once more with fame to grace,
 And raise the antient glory of thy race ?
 Irasia (there in royal state
 High on his honour'd throne Antæus fate)
 The suitor train attending saw ;
 Ardent to win the Libyan Fair they vied,
 Princes, their blood from the same source who draw,
 And foreign Chiefs demand the beauteous bride ;
 For her bright hair in golden ringlets flows,
 And on her blushing cheek Love's brightest lustre glows.

A N T I S T R O P H E.

Whilst each raptur'd Wooer fought
 This gold-crown'd flow'r of youth to gain,
 The monarch strove with anxious thought
 The noblest nuptials to obtain :
 He heard how Danaus of old,
 E'er half its course the radiant day had roll'd,
 In shortest space at Argos found
 With bridal wreaths his fifty daughters crown'd :
 Rang'd at the goal the virgin band,
 A radiant line, the father will'd to place ;

Then to th' impatient lovers gave command
 To wing with flying feet the rapid race ;
 Thus sage decreed all contests to decide,
 And, as they reach'd the goal, each hero chose his bride.

E P O D E.

The Libyan thus decreed
 To highest worth the royal maid :
 Her a bright mark the lengthen'd course to bound,
 In radiant-tinctur'd robes array'd,
 He plac'd, the victor's meed ;
 And thus address'd the youths that clos'd him round ;
 Let him, who first shall touch her vest,
 Lead her, his toils to crown, his prize.
 Swift as the wind Alexidamus flies,
 And with his hand her hand enraptur'd preft ;
 Then led her to his warlike train,
 Whose proud steeds paw'd Numidia's plain ;
 They scatter'd round him wreaths and verdant boughs,
 As Conquest oft before with laurels bound his brows.

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